

To play The Spoiler, head to this golf course in St. Lucie County

Golf courses are a living entity. Like we humans, they age, they grow, they mature. Some for the better, some not so much. One of the best public courses in the country belongs to St. Lucie County. Built atop what was once a county land fill, Fairwinds Golf Course is a testament to what can be done with a parcel of land that nearly everyone thinks has no use other than to be avoided.

If today you were to decide to avoid this Jim Fazio designed treasure, you would be missing out on what has evolved into one of the best courses on the Treasure Coast. Best of all, it's open to all.

I first played Fairwinds in the late 90s when it has just opened. The trees were young, the grass was still growing in and here and there you could see evidence that this was built atop a dump. Today the course looks very different than the one I remember from so many years ago.

The trees have truly matured and provide a nice buffer between the course and the St. Lucie County airport. Some of the old shortcuts that golfers used to take no longer exist thanks to time.

Where golfers once cut the corner on the seventh and 16th holes, there are now much taller, fuller trees on guard. Where some golfers used to

GOLF
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take a shortcut on 18 by playing down the ninth fairway, they now find that route all but blocked.

Years ago, Matt Baum, Golf Course Manager and Head Professional at Fairwinds, decided to have yardage books made of the course. The idea being to provide golfers with as much information about the course as possible.

"When we sent out to have the books made," explained Baum. "The company asked us if we wanted just the hole number for each hole, or did we have a name for each that we'd like to include."

The thought sparked a grand idea in Baum's head. Why not give every hole a name, using an aeronautical theme since the course is adjacent to the St. Lucie County International Airport? To get the course's members and the County's other golfers involved, it was decided that there would be a contest to "Name the 18th Hole at Fairwinds Golf Course".

The treacherous hole has earned quite a legacy over the 17 years that

the course has been open. The par-4 hole with water coming into play on every shot has the reputation of ruining many a good round of golf.

The contest was a huge success, with several hundred names being suggested.

"We found out just how much people dislike that hole," Baum laughed.

The winning name, determined by a vote, was "The Spoiler." While I didn't think of the name, I will say it fits perfectly. Facing an approach shot into a reasonable breeze from 180 yards out, my second shot found water, and "The Spoiler" claimed yet another victim. But it didn't ruin my day.

Fairwinds features generously wide fairways, large greens, and plays to a par of 72 with six sets of tees. Located just north of Fort Pierce and just west of the Indian River Lagoon and near the airport means there are no tall buildings to block the wind coming off the nearby ocean and river. This course can have many personalities depending on the weather.

When we arrived early on a Saturday morning a week ago, I was expecting to see crowds lined up to play. The weather was perfect with hardly a cloud in the sky and temperatures in the low 70s. To my

surprise the course has historically been uncrowded on the weekends. That's good to know if you're a working bloke like myself. By the time our group made the turn however, word must have gotten out as the parking lot was filling and golfers were turning out to enjoy the day.

In addition to wide fairways and beautiful trees, Fairwinds features wonderful greens. They roll fast and true, have just enough undulation to make things interesting, and are receptive to approach shots. The bunkers were recently redone, with the drainage being rebuilt and new sand brought in.

After your round, Di'Michelli's has a full bar and food service. There is even a large banquet pavilion for large events and tournaments.

Fairwinds Golf Course is a facility that every St. Lucie County resident should be proud of. It has won many awards and accolades. To find out more or schedule your own round, call (772) 462-4653 or visit www.fairwindsgolf.com.

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